

(South Side) Lower Main Street Buildings
12 and 14 Main Street
Nantucket
Nantucket County
Massachusetts

HABS No. MASS-954

HABS
MASS,
10-NANT,
82-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

SOUTH SIDE LOWER MAIN STREET BUILDINGS

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MASS
10-NANT,
82-

Location: 12 & 14 Main Street (south side, between Washington and Candle Streets), Nantucket, Massachusetts.

Present Owner: #12 (now known as Zero Main Street): Sherburne Associates
#14: Frank F. Sylvia

Present Occupant: #12: in process of rebuilding for use by Sherburne Associates and leasees.
#14: Leasees of Frank F. Sylvia

Present Use: Shops and offices

Brief Statement

of Significance: It now contains a good example of the rebuilding and remodeling of commercial properties in 1968 to enhance the historic area and economic development of Nantucket.

PART 1. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners:

- 1723 -- Straight Wharf was constructed, running from Candle Street in an easterly direction as a continuation of Main Street, which was then called State Street.
- 1750 -- This busy section was thickly settled with warehouses, refineries for oil, chandleries, cooper shops, ropewalks, etc., as at that time the business section of the town was closer to the waterfront.
- 1775 -- Paddock's Paint Shop stood at the corner of Main & Candle Streets.
- 1795 -- The Citizens Bank of Nantucket occupied 39' - 10" of the block between Washington and Candle Streets, running in an easterly direction from Washington Street.
- 1821 -- At this time the building at corner of Main and Candle Streets was owned by William Coffin. The Nantucket newspaper "The Inquirer" began that year in the back room of the second story, while the lower part was used as a post-office with George W. Ewer as postmaster.
- 1846 -- The whole section was razed in the Great Fire.

The Citizens Bank went out of business and sold its property in October, 1846, to Henry A. Kelley, merchant, for \$1,000. The deed reads in part as follows: "A certain lot of land in said Nantucket represented in the following plot: bounded as follows: beginning at the northwest corner bound of the side site whereon stood the Banking House as the lot now remains (having been reduced by the Town Officers taking a part off to widen the road); thence running by the line of Washington Street southerly 34 feet 11 inches; thence easterly by the land of the heirs of George W. Ewer 16 feet; thence southerly by the same 2 feet; thence easterly by the land of the heirs of Thomas M. & William Coffin 18 feet; thence southerly by the same to Spring Street 18 feet; thence easterly by the line of said street 5 feet 6 inches; thence northerly to the Main St. 60 feet 11 inches; thence westerly to the first bound about 39 feet, 10 inches, together with all the remains of said Banking House."

Kelley also purchased the land from John Paddock extending to Candle Street, and land from heirs of William Coffin at the corner of Main and Candle Streets, thus extending his property to cover the block from Washington Street to Candle Street.

- 1851 -- Charles G. Coffin bought the whole block from Henry A. Kelley for \$6,000.
- 1883 -- Moses Beach and William H. Chadwick bought from heirs of Charles G. Coffin "all land purchased from Henry A. Kelley, being land and block of brick buildings thereon".

Moses Beach sold out his interest to William H. Chadwick, who took down the brick structures then being used as a sail loft and used the bricks and other material to erect the 90' x 40' stables at the estate later known as "Chadwick's Folly" at Squam.

- 1890 -- Henry Paddock bought from William H. Chadwick the westerly portion of the property, the land being 30' in width, and carried on his paint business there until 1938. This part of the block was sold to Frank F. Sylvia and is still owned by him in 1967.
- 1890 -- Washington L. Fisher bought from William H. Chadwick the easterly portion of the block -- the present Sherburne Associates ownership.
- 1914 -- Augustus L. B. Fisher bought easterly property from the other heirs of Washington L. Fisher.
- 1951 -- Lawrence Miller bought from Lucy A. Fisher, exec. u/w Augustus L. B. Fisher.
- 1964 to date -- Sherburne Associates purchased the easterly part of the block -- the adjoining westerly part being owned by Frank F. Sylvia.

2. Date of erection: Straight Wharf was constructed in 1723. The Citizens Bank building was erected about 1790 and razed in 1846, after which the block of brick buildings was erected, to be torn down in 1883 when small wooden structures were put up, in turn taken down in 1966 and replaced by a two-story building.

The building at the westerly end of the block was originally built as a small shop at the corner of Washington and Spring Streets, and was enlarged and remodelled by Henry Paddock in 1890 and in recent years by Frank F. Sylvia.

3. Architect: None.
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: "Careful and laborious crib work was used in the construction of Straight Wharf. As the weighted logs fastened with wooden pegs in the mud and piling on timbers sank into the silt, another layer of logs was put down and rocks added until the sandwiched structure eventually reached above the water. Then pilings were driven around the outline of the expanded layers and Straight Wharf was completed." (Abstract, clipping from Inquirer & Mirror).
5. Notes on alterations and additions: A reconstruction of Straight Wharf was begun in the 1940's, and extensive changes and improvements in the whole area are now being made in 1967.

The present building at #14 Main Street was enlarged and remodelled in 1890 and again in recent years.

A new two-story building is now being erected on the easterly end of the block -- #12.

- B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure: Straight Wharf was constructed in 1723 by Richard Macy, (son of Thomas Macy, a first settler of Nantucket) and associates. There is a difference of opinion as to whether the wharf begins at Union Street, Washington Street, Candle Street, or even Whale Street. However, when the town was moved to its present site, fish lots were laid out which ran up to what is now Union Street. On each side of the wharves water-lots were sold to fishermen and to those fishing houses or shops in that section, and privileges were from the street to the water. The northern portion of Whale Street has now been absorbed by the newly constructed parking space and mall. In recent years Straight Wharf has been considered to begin at Candle Street. Straight Wharf received its name from the fact that it ran straight down Main Street, which until 1835 was called State Street, and it is the oldest Nantucket wharf still standing.

It was owned on shares, amounting to 4831, by some of the prominent businessmen of that period, 19 in all, including six Macys (Silas, Obed, Thomas, Peter, Barzillai and Franklin), Daniel Jones, John Shaw, William Folger, Peter Chase, Matthew and George Myrick, Kimball Starbuck, Prince, Benjamin IV, Libni, George and Zenas Gardner. "Great was the activity there during the bustling period when Nantucket's whaling industry reached its zenith. Everything smelled of tar and oil, the air was filled with seamen's chanties and the shouts of the workers. The wharf piled high with goods in hogsheads, bales and cases and great drays filled with casks rumbled up the wharf to cobblestoned Main Street." Nantucket was the whaling capital of the world; in 1776 one hundred and eighteen vessels left the Island to sail around the world searching for the valuable spermaceti.

Later, Messrs. E. W. Perry & Co. had their lumber yards there where the wood coasters deposited long rows of pine and oak and great piles of lumber. Merchant Edward Perry later bought Straight Wharf from the shareholders and continued it as a freight dock. However, the fate of Straight Wharf followed that of the whaling industry and the wharf fell into disuse.

Around 1870 many excursion boats visited the island and it was at this wharf that the passengers disembarked and spent an hour or two about the town before sailing home again.

In 1891 Killen Bros. bought the wharf and later Killen & Sons sold it to the Pacific Oil Co. In the early 1940's Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence W. Miller bought the wharf and gradual reconstruction was begun by them. Machines dredging the harbor dragged up from the mud many reminders of the cribbing, oddly shaped bottles and whaling implements.

In 1821 the Nantucket paper, The Inquirer, had its first home on the second floor of a building at the corner of Main and Candle Streets, then owned by William Coffin, at which time the lower floor was used as a post-office. The Inquirer was established by J. T. Melcher, with Samuel H. Jenks as editor. The first issue was on June 23rd, 1821.

After 1846 the brick structures on the whole block housed among other things, a sail loft and the store of E. G. Kelley. E. G. Kelley and his older brother Henry A. Kelley, sons of a Providence, R. I. silversmith, moved to Nantucket about 1838 and married here, becoming prosperous merchants, Henry in the whale-oil business, and E. G. advertising silverware, gold watches, clocks, nautical instruments, fancy goods, etc. The business was carried on until the late 1850's. The publication Rich Men of Massachusetts, 1851, states that Henry A. Kelley "started poor. Oil and candle manufacturer. Industrious, enterprising, and quite benevolent. Worth \$70,000."

#14 at the westerly end of the block between Washington and Candle Streets was the location of the Citizens Bank until it burned in 1846 and went out of business.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old Views:

- a. Drawing on file at Nantucket Registry of Deeds attached to deed Book 46, Page 398, showing outline of property with measurements.
- b. Photographs appearing on Inquirer and Mirror calendar 1927, with Lower Main Street in distance in 1867 and 1927 (in the 1867 picture the brick building may be seen).
- c. Drawing in Our Gold Mine by Everett V. Crosby, 1951, showing #14 as it appeared in 1939.
- d. View of Straight Wharf in 1855 in Miss Grace Brown Gardner's Scrapbook Collection (microfilm in Atheneum), Nantucket, Massachusetts.

2. Bibliography:

Stackpole, Edouard A. Rambling through the streets and lanes of Nantucket. 1947, 1949.

Starbuck, Alexander. The History of Nantucket. Boston: C. E. Goodspeed and Co., 1924.

Prepared by Mrs. Marie M. Coffin
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PART II. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared for the Historic American Buildings Survey project on Nantucket, Massachusetts. They are part of a continuing HABS comprehensive survey of the early architecture and urban design of Nantucket financed by a grant from the Nantucket Historical Trust.

The project was under the general supervision of James C. Massey, Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey. Historical information was provided by Mrs. Marie M. Coffin of Nantucket, Massachusetts. Photographs are by Jack E. Boucher of Linwood, New Jersey. The material was edited for deposit in the Library of Congress by Mrs. Constance Werner Ramirez, July 1971.